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MIDEAST-MISSILES BY FRED S. HOFFMAN

WASHINGTON (AP)—AFTER INITIAL SKEPTICISM, U.S. OFFICIALS ARE VIRTUALLY CERTAIN THAT EGYPT HAS RUSSIAN-BUILT MISSILES CAPABLE OF HITTING ISRAELI CITIES.

INTELLIGENCE SOURCES REPORTED ABOUT 20 MOBILE SCUD MISSILES WITH A RANGE OF UP TO 200 MILES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS BEING IN EGYPT. MISSILES WITH SUCH A REACH PROBABLY COULD HIT TEL AVIV AND JERUSALEM IF FIRED FROM NORTHERN EGYPT, THEY SAID.

PENTAGON SPOKESMAN JERRY FRIEDHEIM REFUSED TO COMMENT ON THE REPORTS.

THERE WERE STRONG INDICATIONS THAT THE GUIDED MISSILES ARE ARMED WITH HIGH EXPLOSIVES RATHER THAN NUCLEAR WARHEADS.

ALTHOUGH CONVENTIONAL EXPLOSIVES WOULD BE MUCH LESS DEVASTATING THAN NUCLEAR BLASTS, THE SCUD MISSILES COULD CAUSE SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE AND BRING THE WAR TO ISRAELI CIVILIANS.

AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE SPECIALISTS ARE UNABLE TO SAY WHETHER THE MISSILES ARE MANNED BY RUSSIANS OR WHETHER THE SOVIET UNION HAS TURNED THEM OVER TO THE EGYPTIANS.

EITHER WAY, THE REPORTED APPEARANCE OF THE SCUDS IN EGYPT ADDS A SERIOUS NEW MILITARY FACTOR TO THE UNRESOLVED ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE. FOR THE FIRST TIME IT PUTS IN EGYPT A MAJOR OFFENSIVE WEAPON THAT CAN BE AIMED AT ISRAELI CITIES.

IT ALSO INCREASES THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE ISRAELI AIR FORCE MIGHT LAUNCH A PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE TO KNOCK OUT THAT MISSILE THREAT IN ANY NEW FLARE-UP OF TENSION IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

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